

## God Hears My Prayers

The inspired writer has said, "Draw nigh to God, and he will draw nigh to you." (James 4:8). There is no better way to draw near to the Father than through the medium of prayer. In prayer we talk with God, pouring out our hearts as a child does in the presence of his earthly father. We should not consider prayer a speech to inform God of our needs because Jesus teaches, "Your Father knoweth what things ye have need of, before ye ask him" (Matthew 6:8). However, even though He knows our needs, He expects us to ask for those things we desire.

## The Power of Prayer

It has been truly said, "Prayer can change the night to day." The things wrought by prayer cannot be measured, however, a few Biblical examples should impress us with its power. James writes, "Elijah was a man of like passions with us, and he prayed fervently that it might not rain; and it rained not on the earth for three years and six months. And he prayed again; and the heaven gave rain, and the earth brought forth her fruit" (James 5:17,18 ASV). If a fervent prayer of Elijah could stop the rain for three and a half years, and if another prayer from his lips cause the heavens to open up, surely James is correct when he says, "The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much" (James 5:16). The Bible abounds in accounts of fulfilled prayers. Hannah prayed for a child and God answered her petition (1 Samuel 1). Nehemiah prayed for the Jews in Jerusalem, and through God's providence he was sent to that city to rebuild its walls (Nehemiah 1). Solomon prayed for wisdom and God gave him riches and honor as well (1 Kings 3).

## How to Pray

On one occasion the disciples said to Jesus, "Lord, teach us to pray" (Luke 11:1). The prayer which followed is usually called the Lord's prayer, but might more appropriately be termed the model prayer, since in giving it Jesus said, "After this manner therefore pray ye" (Matthew 6:9). This prayer was offered as a means of teaching the disciples how to pray. It was never intended to be used as a memorized prayer. Notice carefully the language of Jesus. "Our Father which art in heaven, Hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil: For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, forever. Amen" (Matthew 6:9-13). This prayer is to the point and very brief, yet it contains most of the components which might properly be included in a more lengthy prayer. There are at least six parts to prayer. They are (1) address, (2) praise, (3) thanksgiving, (4) confession, (5) petition, and (6) closing. The individual occasion will determine the length and emphasis to be placed on each of these. Some prayers, such as those offered for the bread and fruit of the vine in the Lord's supper, may omit one or more of these parts. **Address** - All prayers should be addressed to God the Father, rather than Christ. We pray **through** Jesus as our mediator, but are not told to pray **to** him. Jesus appropriately began the model prayer with the words, "Our Father which art in heaven." There are many other ways to address God as we approach His throne of mercy. **Praise** - After Jesus in the model prayer addressed the Father, He continued, "Hallowed be thy name." This is an expression of praise which we too often neglect in prayer. A study of the psalms of David reveals his continual praise of God

for His mercy, love, and justice. This appreciation of the greatness of the Almighty partly explains why David is called "a man after God's own heart." **Thanksgiving** - James tells us, "Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and cometh down from the Father of lights" (James 1:17). There are many things for which we may thank God: material blessings, food, clothing, shelter, and protection. Also there are the wonderful spiritual blessings of Christ: the Bible, the church, and the hope of life eternal. Our thanksgiving should be sincere, not simply a catalog of items which we mechanically enumerate. **Confession** - In the parable of the Pharisee and the publican who went into the temple to pray (Luke 18), Jesus states that the publican was justified rather than the Pharisee because he humbled himself before God, while the Pharisee did not. The Pharisee commended himself: the publican confessed his sinfulness. In approaching God we must strip ourselves of pride by acknowledging our mistakes. "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness" (1 John 1:9). **Petition** - While the Father knows our needs, He expects us to ask Him to fill them. We are instructed, "Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you: for every one that asketh receiveth; and he that seeketh findeth; and to him that knocketh it shall be opened" (Matthew 7:7,8). Since we are to confess our sins, we should not forget to ask God to forgive us, as "we forgive our debtors." Our petitions should include requests for a continuation of God's material and spiritual blessings. In the model prayer Jesus asked for "our daily bread," literally, our bread, not for tomorrow or next week, but for this very day. We are to live one day at a time. Our prayers should be as specific as possible, rather than being expressed in vague generalities. We should always ask that the will of God

might be done. "If we ask any thing **according to his will**, he heareth us." (1 John 5:14.) Sometimes we pray for things which are not best for us. We should be willing to let God, in His infinite wisdom, fill our requests as He sees fit. Prayers should never be selfish. This does not mean that we should not pray for the Father to fill our needs, but we should not neglect to pray for others. We ought to pray for those in authority, for the sick, for the lost, for the church and even for our enemies (Matthew 5:44). **Closing** - No prayer should be ended without it being offered in the name of Jesus. "And whatsoever ye do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God and the Father by him" (Colossians 3:17). This is usually expressed at the close of a prayer, although it may be properly stated elsewhere. The word "amen" which is used to terminate prayers means "so be it". It may be thought of as the exclamation point of a prayer and should never be uttered without thinking what it means.

### When to Pray

Paul admonishes, "Pray without ceasing" (1 Thessalonians 5:17). Obviously he does not mean that we should be engaged in prayer every waking moment. Rather, we gain the thought that we should always be of prayerful mind and that our prayer life should be constant. We ought to pray to the Father whenever we feel the need of communing with Him. Nehemiah prayed while in the presence of the king (Nehemiah 2:4). He probably offered a brief silent prayer and it is likely that the king did not even know that he prayed, but as he was about to make an important request of the king, he invoked divine aid that he might receive a favorable answer. Daniel had a pattern of prayer. Three times each day he prayed facing Jerusalem. We are not told that we must face Jerusalem as we pray nor are we told how often we should

pray, yet the example of Daniel in establishing a habit of prayer should be followed by all. It is most difficult to be constant in prayer without having a definite time each day to approach the heavenly throne. If we limit our prayers to those special moments in which we feel a strong urge to pray, too often we will fail to pray altogether. Let it also be noted that the practice of giving thanks for our food should be followed by every Christian. In this we follow the example of Jesus who never ate a meal without first giving thanks to the One who gives us all things.

### Obstacles to Effective Prayer

Many prayers go unanswered. Here are some reasons. (1) **Selfish requests** – (James 4:3). (2) **Failure to pray according to God's will** – (1 John 5:14). (3) **Vain repetitions** – (Matthew 6:7). (4) **Lack of faith** – (James 1:6-7). (5) **Lack of constancy** - (Luke 18:1-8) Jesus teaches us to continue to ask for our wants rather than to ask a single time and then forget about it. (6) **A dishonest heart** - This was the mistake of the Pharisee in the parable previously noted.

### Conclusion

Prayer is one of the most powerful tools the Christian has, but for prayer to be effective, it must be done according to God's Word. It must be sincere, from the heart, done fervently and frequently, and done having faith that God will not only hear, but that He will answer.

This tract is condensed from a lesson presented at the 27<sup>th</sup> Annual Mid-West Lectures, "God's Precious Promises." To hear or view the complete lesson go to [www.kc-cofc.org/2009Lectures.htm](http://www.kc-cofc.org/2009Lectures.htm) or contact the 39th Street Church of Christ 15331 East 39th Street Independence, MO 64055-4240 USA

*God's Precious Promises...*

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